

His Mission Is Facts

Richard McGarrh Helms

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WASHINGTON, April 14— In early 1969, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee the Soviet Union was "going for a first-strike capability" in building new intercontinental missiles. At about the same time, the committee heard Richard McGarrh Helms, Director of Central Intelligence, give a professional estimate that the Soviet Union was concentrating on defensive missiles. Later, on June 23, shortly before the Senate began a debate on an antiballistic-missile system, both men appeared at the same closed session of the committee to resolve the apparent difference.

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According to reports from some of those who attended the session, Mr. Laird retreated partly from his original position, while Mr. Helms deferred to the Administration's view without changing his earlier testimony.

Respected Figure

This ability to keep intact his reputation as a speaker of facts, while avoiding the political fights that emerge around them, makes the 58-year-old, tall and dark Mr. Helms one of the most respected men in Washington.

"Helms is great with Congress," a Senate staff official said recently. "He admits when he doesn't know something. He never lies."

President Nixon went out of his way last May in a television news conference to emphasize that "Director Helms" played a key role in the Administration as one of his advisers.

And today, many members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors appeared to consider it a greater coup that Mr. Helms gave at their convention his first public speech since becoming intelligence director in 1966 than that Mr. Nixon is scheduled to address the meeting later this week.

Reared in Jersey

Mr. Helms was born March 30, 1913, in St. David's, Pa., and reared in South Orange, N.J. He spent two high school years in Switzerland and Germany, learning French and German as well as social graces.

He graduated from Williams College in 1935 with an outstanding record as a Phi Beta

Kappa, class president, school newspaper editor and year-book editor. His classmates voted him "most likely to succeed," "most respected," "the one who had done the most for Williams" and "class politician."

He went to Europe as a cub reporter with United Press and soon made a name for himself by getting an exclusive interview with Hitler.

Financial and personal problems cut short his career as a foreign correspondent, however, and he returned to the United States in 1937 as national advertising manager of The Indianapolis Times.

War a Turning Point

World War II was a turning point for Mr. Helms. He was assigned to the Office of Strategic Services because of his linguistic and other talents and has done nothing but intelligence work since.

After the war, he began to move up the ranks of the newly created Central Intelligence Agency. Associates say it was his capacity for work, his patience, his knowledge and understanding of government and his "professionalism"—traits they say they still admire in him—that brought him quickly to a top position in the agency in the early nineteen-fifties.

He stayed near the top for nearly 15 years under such men as Allen Dulles, Richard M. Bissell, John A. McCone and Vice Adm. William F. Raborn.

Then, in 1966, President Johnson named Richard Helms—he prefers his middle name not be used—as Director of Central Intelligence. Besides the role of senior intelligence adviser to the President and Congress, the job entails being chairman of the United States Intelligence Board and head of the C.I.A.

Mr. Helms was married several years ago to Cynthia McKelvie, 47. It is the second marriage for both. Mr. Helms has a son, Dennis, who is a Washington lawyer, and Mrs. Helms has four children by her previous marriage.

The Helmses are frequently seen on the Washington social scene, at small embassy dinners and on the tennis courts.

Mrs. Helms once told a reporter that she and her husband liked to relax by reading a newspaper to each other for entertainment.

"They often are a bit far out, aren't they," she said with a smile.

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